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RUEPADJ/CJTF-HOA J2X CAMP LEMONIER DJ
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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
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SUBJECT: RUMORS OF MUSLIM PERSECUTION AND DISAPPEARANCES

Classified By: AMB. Scott H. DeLisi for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C/NF) Over the past several months, Poloff has heard rumors of the arrest and disappearance of Muslims in the lowlands of Eritrea. According to several individuals, GSE security forces appear at the homes of Muslims in the lowland areas of the Northern and Southern Red Sea zobas (regions) and in the Gash Barka zoba. The security forces take into custody the adult male members of the household, at times rounding up as many as fifteen to twenty men in a neighborhood. The arrests are justified to the community by the security forces by claiming the individuals are engaged in subversive activity or have ties to Al'Qaeda. Following the arrests, the GSE allegedly detains the men in unknown locations. Family members receive no information about the detained individuals nor do the GSE offer any explanation about the incident or the individual's status. One Eritrean told Poloff that some Eritreans surmise that the GSE executes the arrested individuals. (Comment: This would be a considerable departure from the norm in the case of detentions by the GSE but it is revealing of popular attitudes that citizens are generally prepared to assume the worst about government conduct in such cases. End comment)

¶2. (C/NF) Another Eritrean speculated to Poloff the individuals were arrested because the GSE fears they may have ties to the predominantly Muslim Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF). The ELF is the insurgent organization that preceded the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) led by now President Isaias Afwerki. Despite the merger of the two groups in the 1970's with the EPLF emerging as the dominant group, the current regime has always maintained suspicion that the remnants of the ELF harbor anti-Isaias sentiments and could organize the Muslim community to act against the current government.

¶3. (C/NF) Egyptian Deputy Chief of Mission, Hussein ElShaar (protect) offered Poloff additional insight into the tenuous relationship between the GSE and Eritrea's Muslim community. According to Hussein, the GSE national security force have for many years spied on each mosque and employ a few mosque members to report to national security the discussions and activities of the mosque. When the national security officers feel someone is saying something inappropriate or subversive the individual is arrested. The GSE holds some, without charges, for several months while others remain in detention without due process for years.

¶4. (C/NF) Comment: While the reports of the detentions and disappearance in the lowland remain unconfirmed, the GSE's

efforts to control its citizenry and the longstanding tensions between the Orthodox Christian leadership and the significant Muslim population lend credibility to the unconfirmed reports. Moreover, the Eritreans who recount the incidents have in the past proved reliable and accurate in their accounting of actions taken by the Government of Eritrea (GSE). The GSE has, since independence, targeted Muslims, especially wealthy businessmen, usually under the guise of financial crimes, as a means of controlling both the economy and the population. Given the GSE's continued harassment and suppression of non-Orthodox Christians and its blatant interference with the working of the Orthodox Church, the targeting of Muslims by the government would require no great leap of imagination. End Comment.
DeLisi